

# How our parishes can become pioneering

**Pioneer ministry is often seen as the preserve of specialists. But we all have a role to play in finding new ways to engage others**

IT'S tempting to think of pioneer ministry as something that can only be done by specialists. In fact, the whole Church is called to be pioneering.

At its heart, pioneer ministry means engaging with those who live and work in our communities, who don't come to church or have faith. It involves finding out what might draw them closer to God, and creating worshipping communities and experiences that will do so. What that looks like can be very different from place to place. And building those relationships takes hard work.

In Cosham and Wymering, that process is still ongoing. Churchgoers there have launched a Larder project, a community garden and a fireside gathering. Each involves Christians taking the lead to bring together others around a specific activity or need. The ultimate destination for each of these projects will depend on those who are involved.

The vicar, the Rev Amy Webb, said: "It's about doing things with people, rather than doing things to them. This is about partnership and journeying together, and about what is appropriate in your own context. What we're doing might not be appropriate somewhere else, but the culture shift towards pioneering in this way is important.



**Pioneer minister Fran Carabott leads St Margaret's Community Church, which has created a cafe and soft play area inside the building as part of its ministry**

"The Cosham Larder was always a pioneering project, led by the church with other partners involved. It provides cheap, healthy food to those living in Cosham, Wymering and Paulsgrove – they pay a fee so they can visit weekly and pick out what they like. I've been heavily involved with that as someone who feels that pioneering is vital, but we're now moving to a new phase in which we employ someone else as Larder Manager and Community Pioneer Worker.

"The Community Garden project involves bringing people together

from across the community to work together on a garden project at the heart of Wymering. It's not just about growing fruit and vegetables, or creating flower beds – it's about working in co-operation on something practical to benefit the community.

"And our Fireside Gatherings are a monthly chance for people to sit around a fire, share food and take part in an activity together. We started it five months ago with a hope that a worshipping community of some kind develops, but we are open to how this gets



**Above left: planting in the community garden at Wymering; above centre: the community fireside gatherings at Wymering; above right: the 'thankfulness exercise' with autumn leaves; right: the Rev Heath Monaghan (centre) with others as part of 'Dwell' group meeting on the Isle of Wight**

moulded and shaped by the people who actually come."

At one of the recent gatherings, they engaged in a 'thankfulness exercise' – people wrote things they were thankful for on autumn leaves and strung them up together in garlands, which were used to decorate a tree.

One participant, Gyöngyi Réman, said: "I loved the fire and the whole atmosphere was lovely, great company as well. Lee had a brilliant time and said how great it was to meet the community and get to know some lovely people and enjoy the food."

A group of volunteers from Cosham and Wymering churches took part in two separate diocesan courses on pioneering, led by our Dean of Pioneer Ministry, the Rev Greg Bakker.

"It has been helpful to work with clergy and lay people across our diocese to work out how you turn a parish's energy outwards, to think about what they can do to extend their reach into their local community by pioneering,"

he said. "Pioneering ideally isn't something that is being done independently of parishes – parishes actually have a vital role in connecting with those who are currently unconnected. Parachuting someone new into that situation as an official 'pioneer minister' may or may not work."

Greg will help our parishes to engage with the Church of England's new Greenhouse Project in the New Year. This is designed to help parishes to pioneer – by loving and serving people in their local communities, listening to their needs and establishing new Christian communities alongside the parish church.

Churchgoers will be encouraged to think how they can build those relationships with groups of friends, neighbours, community projects and groups of people who share a hobby. Details are on [www.churchofengland.org/greenhouse](http://www.churchofengland.org/greenhouse).

However, that doesn't mean there's no room for those



specifically called to pioneer ministry. The Rev Heath Monaghan, curate for Ryde and Bembridge, has that title and has been working to create new worshipping communities in Ryde. His involvement partly stems out of his previous role, leading the community hub based at Aspire Ryde, the former Holy Trinity Church.

"We've brought together those who feel disaffected by church, from all denominations, and